

Spiritual Heritage of Humboldt's Idea of University: Study on Universities in Germany

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Abstract

Humboldt advocated traditional classics of teaching and adhered to personality shaping. The best method for personality is academic research. Humboldt considered academic research was a kind of creative activity and behavior. In universities, teaching and research supplement each other. The universities own better conditions than academies of sciences in terms of academic development and communication. Teachers and students improve themselves through academic research. Therefore, universities make outstanding contributions to modernization of the German economy.

Key words: Spiritual heritage; Academics; Combination of teaching and research

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INTRODUCTION

In *Spiritual Heritages of Humboldt's Idea of University - Classical Tradition and Personality Shaping*, we mention that Humboldt energetically improved the status of college of philosophy in universities. The college of philosophy cultivates basic and common human nature of students through teaching traditional classical culture. Meanwhile, the greatest creativity in Humboldt's idea of university

lies in personality shaping with academics. Students carry out self-education, cultivate their perfect human nature and train their ability to harmoniously coexist with the external world through researching academics. This paper mainly interprets one of spiritual heritages of Humboldt's idea of university – “study at universities”.

1. EXPLANATION OF CONCEPT OF “ACADEMICS” (WISSENSCHAFT)

To know Humboldt's combination of teaching and research, firstly, it is necessary to explain academics: in German, academics (Wissenschaft) is a compound word and consists of two nouns (Wissen and Schaft). Wissen (neutral, uncountable) is a gerund which directly derives from the verb wissen (know). So, it owns dynamic meaning. It contains two meanings: a) (a field) the sum of knowledge; b) realize and know. Schaft (positive, plural) refers to (something on instruments, such as gun, flag and spoon) pole; upper of a shoe; axle etc.; in Switzerland, it also refers to the bookcase and bookshelf. Schaft is often used together with nouns as a suffix. In compound words, it is often feminine, without specific meaning.

Through synthesizing German Etymological Dictionary, Wahrig Deutsches Woerterbuch and Mayer Encyclopedia Dictionary, Wissenschaft can be interpreted as follows: Wissenschaft (uncountable noun) replaced Latin scientia (orderly and relevant knowledge field) at the earliest and then turned to Wissen(t)schaft (meanings: Genehmigung; official documents; Vorwissen). Now, such meaning is almost no longer used. Wissenschaft (feminine, plural) has multiple meanings: a) Orderly and evidential certain knowledge (an era) which forms through researches and teaching literatures; it is often translated to science, such as art and science, science and technology; b) It refers to individual field of science and individual science such as medical science, political science,

mathematics and physics; c) As the precondition of science or discipline, it refers to necessary, typical, systematic activity or behavior of proposing arguments, checking and exploring them in institutional framework and the process of gaining science, such as promoting science (research) and serving for science (research) (Duden, 1999; Wahrig, 1980; Meyers Großes Universallexikon, 1981).

Wissenschaft means a kind of academic (research) activity and started from Classical Greek philosophy. In the opinion of Aristotle, only the activity or behavior complying with theories is academics. In such activity, people can carry out researches as observes according to inherent relevance of arguments. For such researches, different research ways may be adopted. Stoics also regard the discussion of problems aiming at practice as academics. So, from Classical Greek period, philosophy is a behavior pattern in need of demonstration.

In the era when Humboldt lived, people frequently used the above three meanings of Wissenschaft. Hence, Wissenschaft must be understood according to the context during translation. Seeing from the works left by Humboldt, he comprehended Wissenschaft from multiple levels. For example, in *On Conditions of Science and Art Prosperity of A nation*, he used the meaning of science; when mentioning individual professional discipline, he would add the adjective *einzelne* (single) or express it with plural form in the context. When expounding the idea of university, he understood Wissenschaft as the activity of creating scientific knowledge and the method to explore a professional field.

Humboldt who studied Kant also absorbed Kant's definition of Wissenschaft. Kant is mentioned in the foreword of *Metaphysics Foundation of Natural Science (Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft)*, if every kind of theory is a system, all cognition settled and concluded according to principles is called science (academics). This concept shows that firstly, the concept of cognition (Erkenntnis) has explained the thought of science (academics) must be demonstrated; secondly, science (academics) is unrelated to individual thought, even if such thought is demonstrated. A system must form. Academics are thus regarded as the result of seeking inherent relevance of views in a well-organized way. Thirdly, such system must own demonstrated structure. Nevertheless, Humboldt further stressed the methods of academics (research). Knowledge is academic, but people should understand the methods to gain knowledge. In academic research, what he emphasized was not formed view, proposition, belief or dogma etc., but the method to explore problems and check them. It may be a thinking process, a specific thinking mode or an experiment. On the contrary, orderly data collection cannot be deemed as academic activity. Besides, dialogues and discussions must exist among scholars engaged in academics (research). The experience that individuals gain only in discussion can be rejected or demonstrated. So, ideological exchange

result of academic researchers is also the expression of thinking rules as well as the expression of language and behavior. People will reach consistence from common perspective and language. Each individual participating in academics (research) will inherit relevant traditions and customs. Meanwhile, academics (research) is also an open evolution process. The individuals involved participate in shaping academic development process and play a connection role (Poser, 2001). In this paper, Wissenschaft is translated to academics, which further approaches Chinese translation in the modern sense and tends to "academic research" and "academic activity". Besides, in German, the noun *Forschung* (research) derives from the verb *forschen*, so it has dynamic meaning. But, people generally used *Wissenschaft* to replace *Forschung*, i.e. the meaning of research activity or behavior. *Forschung* was later widely used. For example, when talking about the principle of "combination of teaching and research" in Humboldt's idea of university, they use research and teaching (*Forschung und Lehre*).

2. CONDITIONS OF UNIVERSITIES AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Why did Humboldt propose academic activity in universities (i.e. research)? Let's first see conditions of universities and especially research status at the turn of the century.

2.1 Problems of Universities

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, German universities owned certain degree of autonomy, teaching freedom and scientific research awareness. Generally speaking, no fundamental changes happened to conditions of universities. Humboldt recorded the classroom scene of a law professor at the University of Marburg: I really dislike his lecture. He totally repeated what the book says and used dull, non-German and ridiculous expression modes; besides, he made some boring jokes and quoted others' countless chapters in full pages.....; in class, I noticed the students were politer than his students in Frankfurt. At least, they did not wear hats in class. This looks more polite. They spoke and laughed loudly, threw scrip mutually and made fun. Even, a big god appeared in the classroom. It rolled on the floor, scratched an itch and made all kinds of noises (Humboldts, 1903-1936).

Humboldt's description is quite representative and fully shows teachers' teaching method was to repeat what the book says. Teachers basically had no independent scientific results and repeated others' books. On the other hand, students' level was low and behaved rudely, without any sense of discipline. In fact, in the second half of the 18th century, college teachers mainly taught courses. Except lectures, teachers also prepared exercises for students, discussed with students and wrote doctoral

dissertation. Hence, professors complained that, they had no ways to write books, because it was even difficult to prepare lectures. Moreover, monarchs of various countries often called professors to formulate laws jointly and held posts in churches. So, they had no energy to do researches. Only 1/4 of philosophy professors in the University of Erfurt had relatively famous works; 2/3 of teachers in Department of Philosophy of University of Ingolstadt had no publications (Turner, 1973, p.524); even in University of Goettingen with certain research tendency, when 19 teachers in the department of philosophy were appointed as associate professor and professor in 1765/66, they published 5 works before appointed as associate professor and published 10 works before appointed as professor. But the works were basically speech drafts, outline of encyclopedia, debates and literature works etc. (Ibid., p.520); these are not real papers.

Some critics considered the major problem of universities was that universities neglected academic development in self-closure, so they tended to do researches in the research institution (i.e. newly founded academy of sciences)¹. Actually, philosophy at that time was developed outside of universities through Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes and Leibniz. Experimental natural science had no position in traditional universities (Schelsky, 1963, p.28). Philanthropists believed universities were not beneficial places for scientific progress and education of teenagers. They criticized universities only paid attention to speculative exploration, and ignored human problem in real environment. Universities not just failed to cultivate intelligence and morality of young people, but also made their view deviate from reality and hindered they focused on real life. Thus, they could not adapt realistic needs. Therefore, the ultimate goal of promoting social and individual happiness which was publicized by universities was of no help.

On the other hand, Wolf refused to work at Berlin Academy in 1740. He chose Halle University. In the same period, Kant also selected to teach at Albertus-Universität Königsberg. Their selection of universities marks research sprout started to appear in universities. In 1751, the setup of academy of sciences made Goettingen become one of the few cities owning universities and academy of sciences. Albert von Haller in charge of academy of sciences considered college teachers should do academic researches except teaching. Academic research not merely lies in collecting, organizing and describing materials, but also lies in expanding experience. The rise in knowledge should be conducted through observation and experiments. The members of academy of sciences

were required to write papers, explain new findings and new researches except participating in monthly regular meetings, and the value of papers should accord with the reputation of scholars and the association (Schelsky, 1963, p.104). All these indicate academic concept have had institutionalization tendency: Academics as pure research, research as teaching source and teaching as research-based study started to be known by others. Although research did not become a due task of professors in German universities like the 19th century, one of features of German modern universities – research began to take shape and laid a foundation for establishing German modern universities in the 19th century.

2.2 Scheme to Solve Problems of Universities

In allusion to conditions of universities at that time, people put forward three obvious views: a) advocate canceling all institutions called university; b) advocate thoroughly reforming universities; c) advocate designing new programs to set up new universities. Firstly, some philanthropists persisted in cancelling universities: They held that knowledge and education offered by universities could not improve social order, let alone increase individual sense of happiness. Universities should be replaced by increasing professional schools. In 1724, medical college founded in Berlin later became an institution and training school almost covering all natural sciences. This fully indicates the development tendency of professional schools (Schelsky, 1963, p.328). Secondly, as philanthropism pedagogy disclosed the weak points, their views about usefulness, personal happiness and perfection gradually lost vigor. Since professional schools they upheld came from France, professional schools were resisted by patriotic persons. Furthermore, influenced by romanticism, people started to respect and value history and considered traditional things had certain value. Besides, those old universities also presented strong vitality. People also took Haller, Erlangen and University of Goettingen for example to explain universities could adapt social changes through reforms. Moreover, universities had owned certain research ability, provided relatively complete specialties and possessed certain scientific research freedom. Therefore, people required reserving old universities in need of reform.

Aiming reform of universities, people put forward suggestions in various aspects, and reform outlines formed. But these outlines failed to gain positive response from Prussia administrative department responsible for universities. Until Treaty of Tilsit was signed after the defeat (1807), the king of Prussia Friedrich William III came up new requirements for universities,

Berlin Academy should be more humanized. It should not prefer to speculative exploration research, but should make contributions to common happy life and perfecting the things related to human needs and enjoyment; national industry should be equipped through research results to make national industry

¹ Prussian Academy of Sciences was founded in Berlin in 1700; Paris Academy of Sciences was founded in 1666; Royal Academy of Sciences was set up in 1662; Austrian Academy of Sciences was set up in 1847.

strong; besides, uncertain and wrong principles should be removed in moral education; people's prejudice and superstition should be suppressed. (Schelsky, 1963, p.12)

The requirements for academy of sciences are also applicable to universities. In order to better arrange human life and obtain useful and practical knowledge, abstract disputes and speculative exploration far away from life should be replaced. In general, universities should become central places with practice which contributed to life. People realized the reform of universities no longer aimed to adapt trend of the era. It was necessary to carry out thorough reform. The reform no longer treated defects and shortcomings of universities. It was required to find new "real German universities" from idealism spirit of Germany (Humboldt, 1846). New directions appeared in some significant reports and literatures, including Schelling's (1775-1854) *Lecture of academic research method* (1802-03), Fichte's (1762-1814) *Deduction plan of founding higher educational institutions in Berlin* (1807), Schleiermacher's (1768-1834) *Thoughts about German universities attached with newly founded universities* (1808), Stephens's *On universities* (1808-1809) and Humboldt's *On internal and external organizations of higher academic institutions of Berlin* (1810) which integrates new ideas of university² (Spranger, 1919).

3. HUMBOLDT'S PRINCIPLE OF COMBINATION OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH

As previously mentioned, before the University of Berlin was set up, although research tendency began to appear in universities, in general, research work was mainly completed through academy of sciences founded in the period of didacticism. The members of academy of sciences acquired fixed salary for focusing on researches. They were not real professors in modern sense. Teaching and research were almost subordinate to the university and academy of sciences. Fichte firstly proposed by the principle of unified teaching and research. He criticized universities were devoted to popularizing pure book knowledge and believed universities just repeated those printed. He proposed that students should "own skills of criticism, eliminate the false and retain the true as well as differentiate useful and useless things" (*Fichtes Sämtliche Werke*, 1845-1846). Schelling believed that college teachers who copied predecessors' research results were incompetent. Schleiermacher and Stephens also came up with similar requirements to oppose teaching method of

scholasticism left by universities in Middle Ages. Based on absorbing their views, Humboldt explicitly proposed combination of teaching and research was one of the basic principles of the University of Berlin. He thought universities completely had the ability to undertake the task of university, and academics would develop better and faster in universities. Hence, in *On internal and external organizations of higher academic institutions of Berlin* (1810), he explicitly proposed features of universities should be same with research institutes, "universities always regard academics as a problem which is not completely solved, so it is still in research state." (Humboldt, 2013, p.90, 91)

With regard to the problem of internal organization of higher academic institution, all keep this principle..... Once people stop studying original academics or imagine academic does not need to be created from the depth of ideological spirit, but it is just necessary to arrange materials through the extensive collection. Then, all are lost irretrievably and forever. (Humboldt, 2013, p.95)

Humboldt thus stressed the status of academic research in universities: the university owned the task of personality shaping and scientific research; the two are mutually related; but the primary task is to develop academics. Personality shaping and talent cultivation are naturally achieved in the process of academic development.

The idea of pure academics provides that scientific research is the primary task of universities. Thus, Humboldt's idea of university is completely different from previous ideas, especially reflected in his definition of the relationship between university and academy of sciences. Although Humboldt planned to continue to expound the problem of academy of sciences with the title of "on academy of sciences" in *On internal and external organizations*, it was interrupted without starting. So, we could not know his concrete ideas about academy of sciences except knowing his objection to separation of internal disciplines of academy of sciences from a report written to Altenstein. It is known from his literature fragment that, compared with academy of the sciences and other organizations, he paid more attention to the university and stressed to do researches in universities. Firstly, Humboldt thought the university was not inferior to the academy of sciences in terms of scientific research (i.e. academic development) and even surpassed academy of sciences. Fichte held that the university and the academy of sciences had no essential difference³ (*Fichtes Sämtliche Werke*, 1845-1846). Schleiermacher believed the two had essential differences. In his opinion, in terms of academic level, the academy of sciences was higher than the university. He considered teaching and scientific research had no necessary relation. The university could community academics through giving lessons, while the

² The five drafts were collected by Springer and published in Spranger, Eduard: "Über das Wesen der Universität". Leipzig 1919. It also appeared in the book of Ernst Anrich: *Die Idee der deutschen Universität. Die fünf Grundschriften aus der Zeit ihrer Neubegründung durch klassischen Idealismus und romantischen Realismus*. Darmstadt 1956.

³ Refer to Article 42 about similarities and differences of the academy of sciences and the university in *Fichte's Deduction Plan*.

academy of sciences should take charge of academic expansion⁴ (Schleiermachers, 1846). However, Humboldt believed that,

The academy of sciences first prospers in foreign countries.....
However, in the new era, no academy of sciences (in the aspect of academic development) performs outstandingly. Academy of sciences makes few or no contributions to development of science and art in Germany. (Humboldt, 2013, p.94)

Moreover,

if people let the university to give lessons and communicate academics and stipulate the academy of sciences shall expand academics, it is obviously unfair to the university. In Germany, academics is certainly expanded through university teachers rather than the academicians in academy of sciences. (Humboldt, 2013)

Humboldt thought academics could gain better development through teaching and learning process at the university, and this was because university teachers gained progress through professional teaching (Humboldt, 2013, p.95). Firstly, "it is not easy to teach academics, if researchers fail to actively digest, absorb and understand it. It is hard to understand academics, if people do not go to university or have no new findings frequently." (Humboldt, 2013, p.94) Secondly, the best paper could be bred through lectures. Finally, academic report of lectures conducted in the university "will certainly encourage those who have used to such research mode." (Humboldt, 2013, p.94) This is because "in the university, academics absorbs a large number of intelligent young scholars. Academics will obviously develop more rapidly and vigorously in the university." (Humboldt, 2013, p.94) Thus, Humboldt drew such conclusion that, "if universities are classified properly, people will certainly believe universities in terms of academic expansion and give up the academy of sciences for the ultimate goal." (Humboldt, 2013, p.95) In order to highlight the university could complete academic research, Humboldt even thought "in fact, it is unnecessary to establish a special academy of sciences, and university teachers could accomplish the task of academy of sciences." (Humboldt, 2013, p.95)

To ensure the leading position of academic research at universities, Humboldt considered resources of academy of sciences should be fully utilized. So, he suggested

to make both (university and academy of sciences) keep vitality, it is necessary to combine the two, though their work is mutually separate. Individual members no longer only belong to the university or the academy of sciences. In such combination, the two can independently exist and can be utilized in a new proper way. (Humboldt, 2013, p.95)

The academy of sciences should serve for academic work of universities, through "giving lectures by the academician when he has not acquired the teaching

qualification, without the need of becoming a member of the university. Some scholars become university teachers and academicians at the same time" (Humboldt, 2013, p.96). The academy of sciences decided the problems of employees, while the university needed national government to appoint employees. In this way, the university and the academy of sciences formed competitions. They "seek balance in interactions" (Humboldt, 2013, p.96) If university teachers were members of the academy of sciences. It would be better. Humboldt thought the advantage of reasonable planning of tasks between the academy of sciences and the university was greater than the disadvantage for national development. He wrote a report to Altenstein on March 25, 1809 and said,

The academy of sciences cannot be confused with the university. The academy of sciences shall be mainly responsible for academic expansion, while the university shall be mainly responsible for academic communication. Not all members of an organization can be appointed to the members of another organization. But for the government of Prussia, it is possible: A system for education and academics is put forward in such an opportunity. It may generate significant influence on the whole Germany. This can gain feedbacks from most places of the mother land. It is possible to let (people) be independent and perfect. This may be the most secure method to enhance a national, lead the nation to a new situation and positively influence national ideology and character. Thus, you will be bound to have the consistent opinion with me. (Humboldt, 1903-1936)

Humboldt believed both the university and the academy of sciences should focus on academics and make contributions to national scientific and artistic prosperity.

CONCLUSION

Humboldt regarded the combination of teaching and research as the best weapon to oppose old universities. He not just gave a death blow to very popular dogmatism and scholasticism, but also far surpassed ancient Greek: colleges in Greece also mainly collected knowledge at the beginning. Knowledge was often deemed as a static thing with fixed existence. In the view of Humboldt, them most advanced task of universities was to transform character and conduct personality shaping. In the university, teaching promoted researches, and researches facilitated teaching and shaped characters. Not only methods to study academics, but also academic ideological spirit generated effects on personality shaping. Studying the universities in Germany made the University of Berlin present a new appearance which was completely different from traditions. Then, studying the universities in Germany was adopted by all universities in Germany. In the 19th century, this became an obligation of university professors. The principle of combination of teaching and research influenced development of higher education in the world while thoroughly changing basic features of Germany

⁴Refer to Chapter 2 of Schleiermacher's Thoughts about school, university and academy of sciences.

universities and became a fundamental guiding principle of universities. Unified teaching and research required by Humboldt also gained new significance in industrial development: Research achievements of universities were applied in enterprises and fast transformed to actual results; enterprises' practical production in turn facilitated academic research and accelerated expansion of academic achievements. All these laid a foundation for development of German economic and national development. Just as John Van de Graaf said in *Academic power – comparison of higher education management systems of seven countries*,

although University of Berlin inherits structural style of Middle Ages to a large extent, it owns a far-reaching innovation, i.e. establish research as the primary mission of universities..... Such thought greatly drove huge scientific progress of German in the 10th century. (Van de Graaf, 2001, p.18)

In this sense, Humboldt's research on the principle of combination of teaching and research of universities in Germany also has certain enlightenment on China's higher education.

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